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By JOHN WESLEY, M. A.

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GENESIS vi. 5.

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

1. **H**OW widely different is this from the fair picture of human nature, which men have drawn in all ages! The writings of many of the antients abound with gay descriptions of the dignity of men: whom some of them paint as having all virtue and happiness in his composition, or at least entirely in his power, with out being beholden to any other being: yea, as self-sufficient, able to live on his own flock, and little inferior to God himself.

2. Nor have *heathens* alone, men who were guided in their researches by little more than the dim light of Reason, but many likewise of them that bear the name of Christ, and to whom are intrusted the oracles of God, spoke as magnificently concerning the nature of man, as if he were all innocence and perfection. Accounts of this kind have particularly abounded in the present century; and perhaps in no part of the world more than in our own country. Here not a few persons of strong understanding, as well as extensive learning, have employed their utmost abilities to shew, what they termed, "The fair side of human nature." And it must be acknowledged, that if their accounts of him be just, man is still but *a little lower than the angels*, or (as the words may be more literally rendered) *a little less than God*.

3. Is it any wonder, that these accounts are very readily received, by the generality of men? For who is not easily persuaded to think favourably of himself? Accordingly writers of this kind are almost universally read, admired, applauded. And innumerable are the converts they have made, not only in the gay, but the learned world. So that it is now quite unfashionable to talk otherwise, to say any thing to the disparagement of human nature! which is generally allowed, notwithstanding a few infirmities, to be very innocent and wise and virtuous.

4. But in the mean time what must we do with our Bibles? For they will never agree with this. These accounts, however pleasing to flesh and blood, are utterly irreconcilable with the scriptural. The Scripture avers, That *by one man's disobedience, all men were constituted sinners: That in Adam all died*, spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God;

that fallen sinful *Adam* then *begat a son in his own likeness*: nor was it possible he should beget him in any other: for *who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?* That consequently we as well as other men, were by nature, *died in trespasses and sins, without hope, without God in the world*, and therefore *children of wrath*: that every man may say, *I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me*. That there is no difference, in that *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*: of that glorious image of God, wherein man was originally created. And hence when the Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, he saw they were all gone out of the way, they were altogether become *abominable, there was none righteous, no not one*, none that truly sought after God:—Just agreeable this to what is declared by the Holy Ghost, in the words above recited. God saw, when he looked down from heaven before, that the *wickedness of man was great in the earth*: so great, that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

This is God's account of Man; from which I shall take occasion, *First*, To shew what men were before the flood; *Secondly*, to enquire, Whether they are the same now? And, *Thirdly*, to add some inferences.

I. 1. I am, *First*, By opening the words of the text, to shew, what men were before the flood. And we may fully depend on the account here given. For God saw it, and he cannot be deceived. He saw, that the *wickedness of man was great*. Not of this or that man; not of a few men only: not barely of the greater part, but of *man in general*, of men universally. The world includes the whole human race, every partaker of human nature. And it is not easy for us to compute their numbers, to tell how many thousands and millions they were. The earth then retained much of its primeval beauty and original fruitfulness. The face of the globe was not rent and torn, as it is now: and spring and summer went hand in hand. 'Tis therefore probable, it afforded sustenance for far more inhabitants, than it is now capable of sustaining; and these must be immensely multiplied, while men begat sons and daughters for seven or eight hundred years together. Yet among all this inconceivable number, only Noah found favour with God. He alone (perhaps including part of his household) was an exception from the universal wickedness, which by the just judgment of God, in a short time after, brought on universal destruction. All the rest were partakers of the same guilt, as they were in the same punishment.

2. God saw all the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart.—Of his soul, his inward man, the spirit within him,
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the principle of all his inward and outward motions. *He saw all the imaginations.* It is not possible to find a word of a more extensive signification. It includes whatever is formed, made, fabricated within; all that is, or passes in the soul; Every inclination, affection, passion, appetite; every temper, design, thought.—It must of consequence include every word and action, as naturally flowing from these fountains; and being either good or evil, according to the fountain from which they severally flow.

3. Now God *saw that all this, the whole thereof was evil;* contrary to moral rectitude; contrary to the nature of God, which necessarily includes all good; contrary to the divine will, the eternal standard of good and evil; contrary to the pure, holy image of God, wherein man was originally created, and wherein he stood, when God surveying the works of his hands, saw them *all to be very good*: contrary to justice, mercy and truth, and to the essential relations, which each man bore to his Creator and his fellow-creatures.

4. But was there not good mingled with the evil? Was there not light intermixt with the darkness? No, none at all: *God saw that the whole imagination of the heart of man was only evil.* It cannot indeed be denied, but many of them, perhaps all, had good motions put into their hearts. For the Spirit of God did then also *strive with man*, if haply he might repent; more especially during that gracious reprieve, the hundred and twenty years, while the ark was preparing. *But still in his flesh dwelt no good thing*: all his nature was purely evil. It was wholly consistent with itself, and unmixed with any thing of an opposite nature.

5. However it may still be matter of enquiry, “Was there no intermission of this evil? Were there no lucid intervals, wherein something good might be found in the heart of man?” We are not here to consider, what the grace of God might occasionally work in his soul. And abstracted from this, we have no reason to believe, there was any intermission of that evil. For God who *saw the whole imagination of the thoughts of his heart to be, only evil*, saw likewise, that it was always the same, that it *was only evil* continually: every year, every day, every hour, every moment. He never deviated into good.

II. Such is the authentic account of the whole race of mankind, which He who knoweth what is in man, who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, hath left upon record for our instruction. Such were all men before God brought the flood upon the earth!—We are, *Secondly*, to enquire, Whether they are the same now?

1. And this is certain, that the scripture gives us no reason to think any otherwise of them. On the contrary, all the above cited passages of scripture refer to those who lived after the flood. It was above a thousand years after, that God declared by *David*, concerning the children of men, *They are all gone out of the way of truth and holiness, there is none righteous, no, not one.* And to this bear all the prophets witness, in their several generations. So *Isaiah*, concerning God's peculiar people, (and certainly the heathens were in no better condition) *The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores.* The same account is given by all the apostles, yea, by the whole tenor of the oracles of God. From all these we learn, concerning man in his natural state, unassisted by the Grace of God, *that all the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are still evil, only evil, and that continually.*

2. And this account of the present state of man is confirmed by daily experience. It is true, the natural man discerns it not: and this is not to be wondered at. So long as a man born blind, continues so, he is scarcely sensible of his want. Much less, could we suppose a place where all were born without sight, would they be sensible of the want of it. In like manner, so long as men remain in their natural blindness of understanding, they are not sensible of their spiritual wants, and of this in particular. But as soon as God opens the eyes of their understanding, they see the state they were in before: they are then deeply convinced, that *every man living*, themselves especially, are by nature *altogether vanity*, that is, folly and ignorance, sin and wickedness.

3. We see when God opens our eyes, that we were before *ἀθεοὶ ἢ κέσμα* without God or rather *Atheists in the world.* We had by nature no knowledge of God, no acquaintance with him. It is true, as soon as we came to the use of reason, we learned the *invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, from the things that are made.* From the things that are seen, we inferred the existence of an eternal, powerful being that is not seen. But still, altho' we acknowledged, we had no acquaintance with Him. And we know there is an emperor of *China*, whom yet we do not know; so we knew, there was a king of all the earth; but yet we knew him not. Indeed could we not, by any of our natural faculties. By none of these could we attain the knowledge of God. We could no more perceive him by our natural understanding, than we could see him with our eyes. *For no one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom*

whom the Son willeth to reveal him. And no one knoweth the Son but the Father, and he to whom the Father revealeth him.

4. We read of an ancient king, who being desirous to know, what was the *natural language* of men, in order to bring the matter to a certain issue, made the following experiment. He ordered two infants as soon as they were born, to be conveyed to a place prepared for them, where they were brought up without any instruction at all, and without ever hearing any human voice. And what was the event? Why, That when they were at length brought out of their confinement, they spake no language at all; they uttered only inarticulate sounds, like those of other animals. Were two infants also to be brought up from the womb, without being instructed in any religion, there is little room to doubt, but (unless the grace of God interposed) the event would be just the same. They would have no religion at all: they would know no more of God, than the beasts of the field, than *the wild asses colt*. Such is *natural religion*! Abstracted from traditional, and from the influence of God's Spirit.

5. And having no knowledge, we can have no love of God: We cannot love him we know not. Most men *talk* indeed of loving God, and perhaps imagine that they do. At least, few will acknowledge they do not love him: but the fact is too plain to be denied. No man loves God by nature, no more than he does a stone or the earth he treads on. What we love, we delight in; but no man has naturally any delight in God. In our natural state, we cannot conceive, how any one should delight in him. We take no pleasure in him at all; he is utterly tasteless to us. To love God! It is far above, out of our sight. We cannot naturally attain unto it.

6. We have by nature not only no love, but no fear of God. It is allowed indeed, that most men have, sooner or later, a kind of senseless, irrational fear, properly called *superstition*, though the blundering *Epicureans* gave it the name of *religion*. Yet even this is not natural, but acquired; chiefly by conversation or example. By nature, God is *not in all our thoughts*; we leave him to manage his own affairs, to sit quietly as we imagine in heaven, and leave us on earth to manage ours. So that we have no more of the fear of God before our eyes, than of the love of God in our hearts.

7. Thus are all men *Atheists in the world*. But Atheism itself does not screen us from *idolatry*. In his natural state, every man born into the world is a rank idolater. Perhaps we may not be such in the vulgar sense of the word. We do not, like the idolatrous heathens, worship molten or graven

ven images. We do not bow down to the stock of a tree, to the work of our own hands. We do not pray to the angels or saints in heaven, any more than to the saints that are upon earth. But what then? We *have set up our idols in our hearts*: And to these we bow down and worship them: we worship ourselves, when we pay that honour to ourselves which is due to God only. Therefore all *pride* is idolatry: it is ascribing to ourselves what is due to God alone. And altho' pride was not made for man, yet where is the man that is born without it? But hereby we rob God of his unalienable right, and idolatrously usurp his glory.

8. But pride is not the only sort of idolatry, which we are all by nature guilty of. *Satan* has stamped his own image on our heart in *self-will* also. *I will*, said he before he was cast out of heaven, *I will sit upon the sides of the north*. I will do my own will and pleasure, independently on that of my Creator. The same does every man born into the world say and that in a thousand instances. Nay, and avow it too, without ever blushing on the account, without either fear or shame. Ask the man, "Why do you do this?" He answers, "Because I had a mind to it." What is this but, "Because it is my will;" that is in effect, because the devil and I are agreed: because *Satan* and I govern our actions, by one and the same principle. The will of God, mean time, is not in his thoughts, is not considered in the least degree: altho, it be the supreme rule of every intelligent creature, whether in heaven or earth, resulting from the essential, unalterable relation, which all creatures bear to their Creator.

9. So far we bear the image of the devil, and tread in his steps. But at the next step we leave *Satan* behind, we run into an idolatry whereof he is not guilty: I mean, *love of the world*, which is now as natural to every man as to love his own will. What is more natural to us, than to seek happiness in the creature instead of the Creator? To seek that satisfaction in the works of his hands, which can be found in God only? What more natural than the desire of the flesh? That is, of the pleasure of sense in every kind? Men indeed talk magnificently of despising these low pleasures, particularly men of learning and education. They affect to set loose to the gratification of those appetites, wherein they stand on a level with the beasts that perish. But it is mere affectation; for every man is conscious to himself, that in this respect he is by nature a very beast. Sensual appetites, even those of the lowest kind, have more or less, the dominion over him. They lead him captive, they drag him to and fro, in spite of his boasted Reason. The man, with all his good-breeding and accomplishments has no pre-eminence, over the goat;
nay;

may, it is much to be doubted, whether the beast has not the pre-eminence over him? Certainly he has, if we may hearken to one of their modern oracles who very decently tells us,

“ Once in a season, beasts too taste of love ;
 “ Only the beast of reason is its slave,
 “ And in that folly drudges all the year.”

A considerable difference indeed, it must be allowed, there is between man and man, arising (beside that wrought by preventing grace) from difference of constitution, and of education. But notwithstanding this, who, that is not utterly ignorant of himself, can here cast the first stone at another? Who can abide the test of our blessed Lord's comment on the seventh commandment? *He that looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart?* So that one knows not which to wonder at most, the ignorance or the insolence of those men, who speak with such disdain of them that are overcome by desires, which every man has felt in his own breast! The desire of every pleasure of sense innocent or not, being natural to every child of man.

10. And so is the *desire of the eye*, the desire of the pleasures of the imagination. These arise either from great, or beautiful, or uncommon objects: if the two former do not coincide with the latter; for perhaps it would appear, upon a diligent enquiry, that neither *grand* or *beautiful* objects please any longer than they are *new*: that when the novelty of them is over, the greatest part at least, of the pleasure they give is over; and in the same proportion as they become familiar, they become flat and insipid. But let us experience this ever so often, the same desire will remain still. The inbred thirst continues fixt in the soul: nay, the more it is indulged, the more it increases, and incites us to follow after another, and yet another object, altho' we leave every one with an abortive hope, and a deluded expectation. Yea,

“ The hoary fool, who many days
 Has struggled with continued sorrow,
 Renews his hope and fondly lays
 The desperate bet upon to-morrow!
 “ To-morrow comes! 'Tis noon! 'Tis night!
 This day like all the former flies:
 Yet on he goes to seek delight
 To-morrow, till to-night he dies!”

11. A third symptom of this fatal disease, the love of the world, which is so deeply rooted in our nature, is *the pride of life*,

life, the desire of praise, of the honour that cometh of men. This the greatest admirers of human nature allow to be strictly natural: as natural as the sight or hearing, or any of the external senses. And are they ashamed of it, even men of letters, men of refined and improved understanding? So far from it, that they glory therein; they applaud themselves for their love of applause! Yea, eminent *Christians*, so called, make no difficulty of adopting the saying of the old, vain Heathen, *Animi dissoluti est, & nequam negligere quid de se homines sentiant*: "Not to regard what men think of us, is the remark of a wicked and abandoned mind." So that to go calm and unmoved thro' honour and dishonour, thro' evil report and good report, is with them a sign of one that is indeed *not fit to live: away with such a fellow from the earth*. But would one imagine, that these men had ever heard of Jesus Christ or his Apostles? Or that they knew who it was that said, *How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not that honour which cometh of God only?* But if this be really so: if it be impossible to believe, and consequently to please God, so long as we receive or seek honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only: Then in what a condition are all mankind: The Christians as well as the Heathens! Since they all seek honour one of another! Since it is as natural for them so to do, themselves being the judges, as it is to see the light which strikes upon their eye, or to hear the sound which enters their ear: yea, since they account it the sign of a virtuous mind, to seek the praise of men; and of a vicious one, to be content with the honour which cometh of God only!

III. 1. I proceed to draw a few inferences from what has been said. And first, from hence we may learn one grand, fundamental difference between Christianity, considered as a system of doctrines, and the most refined Heathenism. Many of the antient Heathens have largely described the vices of particular men. They have spoken much against their covetousness or cruelty, their luxury or prodigality. Some have dared to say, That "no man is born without vices of one kind or another." But still, as none of them were apprized of the fall of man, so none of them knew his total corruption. They knew not that all men were empty of all good, and filled with all manner of evil. They were wholly ignorant of the entire depravation of the whole human nature, of every man born into the world, in every faculty of his soul, not so much by these particular vices, which reign in particular persons, as by the general flood of atheism and idolatry, of pride, self-will and love of the world. This therefore is the first, grand,

grand, distinguishing point between Heathenism and Christianity. The one acknowledges, That many men are infected with many vices, and even born with a proneness to them: but supposes withal, that in some the natural good much overbalances the evil. The other declares that all men are *conceived in sin, and shapen in wickedness*: that hence there is in every man a *carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not, cannot be subject to his law, and which so infects the whole soul, that there dwelleth in him, in his flesh, in his natural state, no good thing; but all the imagination of the thoughts of his heart, is evil, only evil, and that continually.*

2. Hence we may, *secondly*, learn, That all who deny this, (call it *Original Sin*, or by any other title) are but Heathens still, in the fundamental point which differences Heathenism from Christianity. They may indeed allow, that men have many vices: that they are born with us: and that consequently we are not born altogether so wise or so virtuous, as we should be; there being few that will roundly affirm, "We are born with as much propensity to good as to evil, and that every man is by nature as virtuous and wise, as Adam was at his creation." But here is the *Shibboleth*: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, *Is every imagination of the thoughts of his heart evil continually?* Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but an Heathen still.

3. We may learn from hence in the *third* place, what is the proper nature of religion, of the religion of Jesus Christ. It is *Θεραπευτική Ψυχῆς*. God's method of healing a soul which is *thus diseased*. Hereby the great physician of souls applies medicine to heal *this sickness*; to restore human nature, totally corrupted in all its faculties. God heals our atheism by the knowledge of Himself, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, by giving us faith, a divine evidence and conviction of God and of the things of God; in particular of this important truth, Christ loved *me* and gave himself for *me*. By repentance and lowliness of heart, the deadly disease of pride is healed; and of self-will, by resignation, a meek and thankful submission to the will of God: And for the love of the world in all its branches, the love of God is the sovereign remedy. Now this is properly Religion, *Faith thus working by Love*,—working the genuine, meek humility, entire deadness to the world, with a loving, thankful acquiescence in and conformity to the whole will and word of God.

4. Indeed if man were not thus fallen; there would be no need of all this. There would be no occasion for this work
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in the heart, this *renewal in the spirit of our mind*. The *superfluity of godliness* would then be a more proper expression than the *superfluity of naughtiness*. For an outside religion without a godliness at all, would suffice to all rational intents and purposes. It does accordingly suffice in the judgment of those who deny this corruption of our nature. They make very little more of Religion than the famous Mr. *Hobbs* did of Reason. According to him, Reason is only, "A well-ordered train of Words: according to them, Reason is only a well ordered train of words and Actions." And they speak consistently with themselves; for if the inside be not *full of wickedness*, if this be clean already, what remains but to *cleanse the outside of the cup*? Outward reformations, if their supposition be just, is indeed the one thing needful.

5. But ye have not so learned the oracles of God. Ye know, that he who seeth what is in man, gives a far different account both of nature and grace, of our fall, and our recovery. Ye know that the great end of religion is, to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent. Ye know that all religion which does not answer this end, all that stops short of this, the renewal of our soul in the image of God, after the likeness of him that created it, is no other than a poor farce, and a mere mockery of God, to the destruction of our own soul. O beware of all those teachers of lies, who would palm this upon you for Christianity; regard them not, though they should come upon you with all the *deceivableness of unrighteousness*, with all smoothness of language, all decency, yea beauty and elegance of expression, all professions of earnest good-will to you, and reverence for the holy scriptures. Keep to the plain old *faith, once delivered to the saints*, and delivered by the Spirit of God to your hearts. Know your disease? Know your cure! Ye were born in sin: therefore *ye must be born again*, born of God. By nature ye are wholly corrupted: by grace ye shall be wholly renewed. *In Adam ye all died*: in the second *Adam*, in Christ, *ye all are made alive*. You that *were dead in sins* hath he quickened: he hath already given you a principle of life, even *faith in him who loved you, and gave himself for you*! Now go on from *faith to faith*, until your whole sickness be healed, and all that *mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*.

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